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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000344

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: EMBASSY URGES GOK TO COOPERATE WITH
EXISTING MPTS

REF: PRISTINA 336

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael J. Murphy
for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) During an August 13 courtesy call, Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci expressed his desire for continued cooperation with the Embassy, and pledged to make no important policy decisions without prior consultation. The Charge noted that the United States shared Kosovo's strategic priority -- its development as a tolerant, prosperous, multi-ethnic democracy. He reiterated USG support for Kosovo's decentralization process (reftel) and urged Thaci and the GoK to continue the work of forming municipal preparation teams, and to support the teams once established. He praised the progress being made on demarcation of Kosovo's border with Macedonia, but urged restraint in public discussion of the issue. Finally, he underscored the imperative of support for Kosovo's Central Electoral Commission (CEC). In a pull aside following the meeting, Thaci expressed his concern at Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha's active involvement in Kosovo politics. He asked the USG, through Embassy Tirana, to weigh in with Berisha on the issue, emphasizing, "Kosovo is an independent country and not a province of Albania." END SUMMARY

EXPECTATIONS OF CONTINUED CLOSE COOPERATION

12. (C) Prime Minister Hashim Thaci received the Charge for a courtesy call August 13, and pledged his desire to continue the strong working relationship between the GoK and the Embassy. Thaci said that he hoped to continue to meet the Chief of Mission weekly, as he valued the Embassy's work and its policy advice, adding that he looked forward to his "good friend" Ambassador Dell's return to Pristina. Much had been achieved, according to the Prime Minister, but challenges remained. He pledged to take no serious policy decision without consulting the Embassy first. Thanking the Prime Minister for his words of welcome, the Charge noted that this was a time of optimism in Kosovo and for Kosovo, and that it was our joint work to make sure that this optimism grew by continuing to make tangible progress on critical issues like the rule of law. He added that the USG and the GoK shared a primary strategic objective here: Kosovo's growth as a

tolerant, prosperous, multi-ethnic democracy taking its place in the Euro-Atlantic community of nations.

INTERNAL POLITICS - SUPPORT FOR THE CEC

13. (C) Thaci offered his view of local politics; he described his coalition government as stable, and noted that it included "the PDK, the LDK, Serbs, Turks and Bosniaks." Thaci described his relations with Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu, the LDK leader, as good. According to Thaci, he and President Sejdiu had agreed that government ministers should not run in municipal elections slated for November 15, so as not to harm the work of Kosovo's institutions. Thaci said he wanted free and fair elections November 15, with participation from Kosovo's minority populations. Thaci called the Central Electoral Commission's (CEC's) decision not to install closed-circuit television (CCTV) at polling stations correct and said that it was his wish and Sejdiu's that the decision not be politicized. Charge agreed that the CEC's decision on CCTV was correct, and that CCTV represented a huge expense that would deliver little or no benefit for the election process. (Note: Embassy and USAID-funded implementers had made several approaches to the CEC Chair with a similar message prior to the decision. End Note.) He also requested the GoK to give the CEC the support it needs, particularly in office space, to successfully organize the November polls. Thaci replied that monetary support and additional office space for the CEC were on the agenda for the August 13 session of the GoK.

CONTINUED USG SUPPORT FOR MPTs

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14. (C) On decentralization, Thaci understood Kosovo's need to implement the Ahtisaari Plan, and said that the GoK would support municipal preparation teams (MPTs -- reftel). The Charge noted that the USG viewed decentralization and the coming elections as separate processes, and wanted to see success in both. He called for continued progress in the establishment of MPTs, adding that the team for the new municipality of Gracanica should be completed soon. Equally important, however, was continued support to MPTs as they worked to build the structures of governance in the new municipalities. While the Klokot MPT included committed Serbs and Albanians eager to succeed, it had received neither the access nor the support it needed from its mother municipality of Viti/Vitina and its PDK mayor. The Charge asked that Prime Minister Thaci address this, and he agreed to do so.

CAUTION URGED IN PUBLIC REMARKS ON DEMARCATION

15. (C) The Charge noted that the demarcation of the Kosovo-Macedonia border nears completion, adding that this would represent an historic step forward for both countries and their bilateral relations. He urged the GoK to be mindful of sensibilities in Skopje, and not to make statements that could put an agreement in jeopardy. Specifically he asked that GoK officials refrain from describing the process as an "offset" or a "land swap," and instead to refer to it simply as a demarcation. Thaci agreed.

CONCERN FOR ALBANIAN 'MEDDLING' IN KOSOVO POLLS

16. (C) In a private conversation immediately following the meeting, Thaci told Charge that he was worried by Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha's meddling in Kosovo politics. (Note: Within the past week Berisha met with Ramush Haradinaj to sign a memorandum of understanding on interparty cooperation between Berisha's Democratic Party and Haradinaj's AAK. End note.) Thaci noted that Berisha planned to visit Pristina in mid-September, adding that he would welcome a visit by Berisha to Kosovo to discuss the bilateral relationship, but did not want to see him

campaigning in Kosovo for the LDK (his coalition partner) or for Haradinaj's opposition AAK. Thaci said that Albanian involvement in Kosovo politics represented a threat to Kosovo, and asked the Embassy to oppose such involvement. He also asked the USG, through Embassy Tirana, to weigh in with Berisha and urge him to refrain from statements or actions that raise fears in the region about pan-Albanianism.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Like Prime Minister Thaci, we want to see results from the decentralization process, but real results will be difficult to attain without the commitment of the GoK at the central and municipal level. We will insist on this commitment, mindful that progress during the election season will be neither easy nor guaranteed, a point made with Minister of Local Government Administration Sadri Ferati later the same day. We agree also that the involvement of politicians from the Republic of Albania (and from Kosovo) in races outside their country is problematic and unhelpful. Though we suspect that if Berisha had embraced the PDK, Thaci would have less concern about the threat of pan-Albanian politics for Kosovo and the region, we also believe it might be useful to remind our interlocutors in the region of the potential damage their short-term political maneuvers can have on our shared long-term interests. END COMMENT

MURPHY